Volume II - Guide to Designing Curriculum

Honoring Tribal Legacies: An Epic Journey of Healing

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HONORING TRIBAL LEGACIES

A PDF downloadable version available at:
www.HonoringTribalLegacies.com

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CHAPTER 6

Collecting More Than Evidence:

Graduating from High School in Washington State Using Culturally Responsive Tasks to Show Reading, Writing, and Mathematical Skills

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Introduction

In 2006, the Washington State Legislature approved legislation that required students in the class of 2008 and beyond to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement, by passing a reading, writing, and mathematics assessment in order to graduate from high school.[1] While many believed these new requirements would better equip all students to be successful after high school, others felt some students might feel large-scale assessments would leave them voiceless, disenfranchised, and discouraged. Advocates for students who struggled to meet this new graduation requirement urged Washington's legislature to create alterNative paths for students who possessed proficient skills in the content but for one reason or another needed the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in another way, perhaps in a setting that was more culturally-relevant, authentic, and applicable to students' interests.

After hearing testimony by three particular groups—educators of Indigenous students, faculty of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, and parents and school counselors of students who suffered from severe test anxiety—the legislature approved three alterNative methods to demonstrate skills that were equal to or greater in rigor than the large-scale assessments. The three alterNatives were a grade comparison system, college test scores equivalency, and a classroom-based assessment called the Collection of Evidence (COE). The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) was given the job to oversee these options, collectively called Certificate of Academic Achievement Options.

This paper describes how one of these options, the Collection of Evidence, was developed and implemented with a connection to Indigenous students (i.e., Native Americans and Alaska Natives). OSPI staff continually strive to support culturally relevant and authentic opportunities for Indigenous students to show their knowledge and skills. Research regarding instruction for Indigenous students is addressed throughout the paper in order to verify the use of a culturally-relevant alterNative assessment as appropriate for high school graduation. The use of this research by Native American educators is an acknowledgement on our part that, as non-Native authors, we observe and comment on our assessment from a non-Indigenous view. The expert

perspective for Indigenous students found throughout the selected research is evident. It endorses the importance of Indigenous student success with recognition that these students have one foot in the world of the "mother" culture and the other foot in the world of the "mainstream." We write this paper as a statement that valid and reliable alterNative assessments based in cultural relevance can be a viable method of showing proficiency on state standards.

Collection of Evidence (COE)

The COE is a classroom-based collection of work that offers students the opportunity to select reading passages, writing prompts, and mathematics problems that match an individual student's interests, cultural background, and specific areas of technical focus. The COE's format encourages teachers to use teaching methods and curriculum materials directly relevant to their students' lives and values. The content knowledge and proficiency levels within the COE requirements are the same skills required for all Washington State students. Teachers can embed the instruction of state standards into rich contexts, which may provide students a gathering place where previously-marginalized stories, writings, and issues can be raised. While constructing COEs, teachers serve as mentors, students are apprentices, and the collected work provides an authentic "snapshot" of the whole student.

OSPI content staff (reading, writing and mathematics assessment experts) created a list of COE requirements that included the development of performance tasks that offered authentic entry points for Indigenous students. Since the COE is the opportunity for students to "speak" through their performance on tasks administered in a learning environment rather than a testing environment, it allows students to bring their histories and perspectives as well as their reading, writing, and mathematics skills to the table. With the COE, Indigenous students, and many others, are able to demonstrate the skills necessary to earn their high school diploma by submitting classroom-based work samples.

In this chapter, we will recognize the work of the Gordon Commission. This group of national experts convened to study the current policy and practice of educational assessment, to estimate

how education will change in the future and what a proactive response should be, and to generate recommendations concerning the design of future models for the use of educational assessment. Next, we will explore other states in the country that offer different types of alterNative assessments as options for meeting graduation requirements. Then, with an understanding of the national policy and the state-level implementation in place, the remainder of this chapter focuses on the COE and its continuing work towards supporting culturally-relevant and authentic opportunities for Indigenous students to show their knowledge and skills to meet graduation requirements.

The COE guidelines, a reading passage, a writing prompt, and a description of a mathematics task are presented here both as evidence for our approach and for actual use in the classroom. (Links to all classroom materials appear in the Appendix.) We also include two COE success stories: one from a student and another from an administrator. Our conclusion is designed to bring our approach full circle by reflecting on the COE's opportunity for students who have not met standards, and their teachers, to participate in a powerful, authentic and rigorous assessment.

Gordon Commission

The need for alterNative assessments such as the COE is addressed in the work of the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessments in Education.[2] Jim Pelligrino, a member of the Commission says,

> **. . . good assessments provide timely, constructive information that help students accelerate their learning and teachers personalize instruction. Commission members expressed concern that the use of test results for the sole purpose of school accountability has overshadowed, at times, the more valuable uses of assessments. The Commission also found that although digital technologies that may one day be used for real time assessment of learning show promise, much more research is required before they can be fully integrated into classrooms and schools. Accountability must be achieved in a way that supports high quality teaching and learning. It must be remembered that at their core, educational assessments are statements about what educators, state policy makers, and parents want their students to learn and, in a larger sense, become. What we choose to assess will end up being the focus of classroom instruction.[3]**

Pelligrino's assertion that good assessments provide valuable information about students aligns with the philosophical commitment of Washington's assessment program, including the COE. The COE is an exit exam and is not used for school accountability. Plainly speaking, the Gordon Commission's work is an influential statement to educators and policy makers about the need to review the use of assessments in education. But, as purposefully political as the Gordon Commission's goal is, the words of its chairperson remind the researcher and the teacher alike to focus on the real goal—to know students. Dr. Edmund Gordon says,

> **One of the things we've been exploring in the commission is the relationship between the affective and situative domains in relation to the cognitive domains. We're beginning to understand that, in human intellectual functions, the affective (or the emotional) and the social situations in which problems are engaged are as important as the cognitive processes on which we have been focusing our attention.[4]**

Gordon reminds us that the core of alterNative assessments should be to respect and honor the heart, the head, the community, and the personal context of a complete student. The clarity of Gordon's thinking leads to the reality that a multi-faceted assessment is a true measure of a student walking into the adult world with the skills and knowledge to make a difference.

COE Compared to Other State Approaches

A review of other states' approaches to alternative assessments used for graduation purposes provides context for the unique nature of Washington's COE and the strong commitment Washington has made to purposefully address the importance of creating collections that represent the interests and values of Indigenous students. States, districts, and schools refer to a compilation of student work with various terms such as collections, assortments, selections, and portfolios. For the purposes of this discussion, all of the alterNative assessments that involve a body of student work will be referred to as "collections." This designation will provide a common understanding of the use of student-driven assessment used in a variety of ways.

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) published a document entitled "Profile of State High School Exit Exam Policies" in 2011.[5] According to the state-specific information, seven states in the country offer a collection of evidence (or similar title) as alterNative routes for high school graduation.[6] Massachusetts and New Jersey see a collection of evidence as a "last chance" attempt to graduate. They refer to the alterNative assessment as an "appeal." They also require many attempts at large-scale tests prior to providing students access to a collection. Students are required to take the large-scale state tests several times a year, attend remediation programs, maintain a 95% attendance rate, and hold a consistent grade point average for set periods of time before they become eligible to submit a collection. In calling the student work an "appeal" and requiring four "traditional" attempts to meet standards, students who struggle may find their desire to graduate becomes dimmer with each unsuccessful experience.

Students in Oklahoma and New Mexico must also try multiple traditional assessments before attempting "end of course" projects aligned with state standards. However, like Massachusetts and New Jersey, the purpose of their collections is not clearly articulated as an alterNative assessment. Maryland, Oregon and Washington go beyond the four previous states in their recognition that student collections are rigorous, aligned to the state standards and developed in the classrooms. Maryland offers an opportunity for students to submit a collection that contains state-designed project modules. After not meeting standards on a state assessment, student projects are designed at the state level, aligned with the state guidelines, reviewed by teachers, and scored at the local level.

Oregon and Washington offer students the opportunity to develop and submit collections with the most authentic match between classroom work and proficiency expectations. In Oregon, students are able to put together multiple pieces of evidence in order to create a compensatory compilation that shows their ability to meet a standard. Students are able to access the collection option without first failing the state test. The state education department works with committees of teachers to develop state assessments that are given at the local level and scored by classroom teachers using state scoring rubrics. Although Oregon's classroom-based assessment acknowledges

the legitimacy of an alterNative assessment as an equal route to meeting graduation requirements, there does not appear to be a documented process for developing a culturally-sensitive set of tasks. Like most of the states with alterNative assessments, Washington requires all students to attempt the large-scale tests in reading and writing—the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE)—and the mathematics End of Course (EOC) Exams in Algebra and/or Geometry before accessing the COE.[7]

The analysis of the seven states shows that, while the collection of evidence option is available to students in many states, Washington appears to be unique in its opportunity for individuals to show skills through a culturally-relevant lens. The COE is the most expensive of the assessments offered to Washington students; the general assessment costs about $30 per test and the COE costs about $400 per test. As such, the program is continually scrutinized by the legislature and a couple of recent changes have been made to reduce the overall costs of the program. Initially, Washington state teachers were trained to score the collections. This provided a valued opportunity for professional development, which strengthened the teachers' understanding of best practices for classroom instruction and provided insight on how to support students in the development of collections. Due to budget limitations beginning in the school year 2012–2013, the COE is no longer scored by teachers but instead by local, professional scorers. Also, students must attempt the large-scale test twice in order to access the COE, and may only submit one collection per content area in the course of their high school career. Intense discussion accompanied the changes, but the state legislature and OSPI concluded that continuing to provide access to the COE was important even though the opportunity had to be narrowed to one attempt.

COE Guidelines

The guidelines for the COE involve students submitting 6–8 "tasks" that showcase their best work in the content area (reading, writing or mathematics). A task is an assignment framed to address the state content standards. The guidelines encourage classroom teachers to provide students instructional intervention over time, practice their skills at their own pace, and produce

their unique "take" on the topic. Throughout the process of building a COE, students develop skills, verify understanding, and create a picture of who they are and what they value.[8] Geneva Gay (2010) in her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, takes this analysis even further when she talks about Indigenous students' ways of thinking and ways of being that merge the self with a high school diploma. When an Indigenous student successfully submits a COE and meets the academic requirements to graduate from high school, the effect can be powerful. Gay says,

> **It is intellectually liberating. This freedom results in improved achievement of many kinds, including increased concentration on academic learning tasks, such as clear and insightful thinking; more caring, concerned, and humane interpersonal skills; better understanding of interconnections among individual, local, national, ethnic, global, and human identities; and acceptance of knowledge as something to be continuously shared, critiqued, revised, and renewed. (p. 37)** [9]

It is not only students who benefit from accessing the COE but their teachers as well. Through both the scoring process and the development of instructional intervention strategies focused on skills immersed in the Indigenous student's life, teachers have developed a heightened awareness of how to merge state standards and the community values of Indigenous people. Gay comments on the impact:

> **For some, culturally responsive teaching is also liberating in that it guides students in understanding that no single version of "truth" is total and permanent. For this, teachers make authentic knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students. The validation, information, and pride that culturally appropriate pedagogy generates is both psychologically and intellectually interesting. (p. 37)**

Washington's COE alterNative assessment has been successful for all types of students but it is not a panacea that produces a 100% passing rate. The struggle that some Indigenous students may feel to find their voice and show their skills is also apparent for out-of-country transfer students who try to cope in a world where English is their second language. Many students transfer into the

state from South American, Asian, European, and African countries and feel immense pressure to graduate from high school. Students who come from backgrounds of poverty and attend school intermittently often have to depart from their family's history and experience in order to pursue a high school diploma. Every student has a story. Every student wants to be heard. But, sometimes the school system inadvertently imposes rules and expectations on both teachers and students that they must overcome.

COE problems, tasks, and prompts were developed collaboratively by OSPI staff and teachers in Washington's schools over a period of time. Early on, it became a priority for OSPI to develop tasks to engage a wide variety of students, including Indigenous students, with meaningful contexts. In the early days of the COE, there was a great range of teacher-developed assessments. Some teachers initially struggled as they used a variety of materials to create their tasks. They found that textbooks did not work, district or school-specific curriculum was too narrow, and trying to incorporate outside materials often did not engage all students. After years of task development, there was a final core concept that emerged: context was everything. When educators realized that passages, problems, tasks, and prompts written by and about Indigenous people engaged these students, the responsibility and the opportunity to provide a variety of relevant contexts became paramount.

In conjunction with OSPI staff, the work began on developing culturally-relevant assessment materials. They agreed that well-written reading and mathematics tasks and writing prompts would share common characteristics. These prompts would be:

- **authentic** to student interest and background;
- **relevant** to students' lives, values, and communities;
- **accurate** in depicting social and historical issues;
- **respectful** to ways that honor non-traditional ways of thinking;
- **rair** and free from bias in order to elicit responses in a safe setting;
- **valid** in order to match the requirements of proficient work; and,
- **reliable** in order to demonstrate that passages, tasks, and prompts elicit similar application of skills from different students.

Once these characteristics were defined, task development for the COE became the coalescing place where thoughtful educators of Indigenous students shared their materials to develop tasks that represented diversity and cultural relevancy. Teachers invested themselves professionally by selecting their own reading passages, creating reading and mathematics tasks, and developing writing prompts. Teachers submitted their own problems, tasks, and prompts annually, and they were reviewed at the school, district, and state levels. Districts and schools formed task-writing committees and matched the tasks to their curriculum and professional development plans. At the beginning of every school year, OSPI collected problems, tasks, and prompts that were "retired" from the pool or bank of tasks. OSPI staff reviewed the problems, tasks, and prompts and made sure they aligned with the state standards and the COE guidelines. As of 2012, OSPI retired these teacher-made tasks and released them to the field via a CD and online locations including the COE webpage: www.coe.k12.wa.us. Currently, all tasks submitted in a COE must come from an "Inclusion Bank" of state generated problems, prompts, tasks.

COE Examples

Here we will turn to sharing some examples of reading passages and tasks, mathematics problems, and writing prompts developed by educators of Indigenous students for use in COEs. All of the problems, tasks, and prompts follow the same guidelines used for developing Inclusion Bank assessments. Joseph Bruchac granted us permission to use his poem "Birdfoot's Grandpa" as a sample reading passage, and the "Dear Grandchildren" writing prompt was in place for several years as an Inclusion Bank prompt. A current mathematics COE task was not available at the time we went to press. However, we have described the core characteristics necessary to include in the development of a mathematics COE task.

In a Reading COE, a work sample is the student's written response to questions linked to a passage. In the Reading COE, students are asked questions representing three levels of reading understanding: comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking. Within each of these three levels, the questions are developed from a subset of academic skills. These skills are called targets. In the

Birdfoot's Grandpa
by Joseph Bruchac

The old man
must have stopped our car
two dozen times to climb out
and gather into his hands
the small toads blinded
by our light and leaping,
live drops of rain.
The rain was falling,
a mist about his white hair
and I kept saying
you can't save them all,
accept it, get back in
we've got places to go.
But, leathery hands full
of wet brown life,
knee deep in the summer
roadside grass,
he just smiled and said
they have places to go, too.

guidelines for the Reading COE,[10] students must read three or four literary passages and three or four informational passages. There are three questions in a task, each representing a target. In the poem by Joseph Bruchac, "Birdfoot's Grandpa,"[11] the poem meets the criteria for cultural relevancy described above. The poet immediately establishes the **authenticity** of the theme, traveling with one's elder, by describing the journey the young person and the grandfather are taking together. The poem illustrates the **relevancy** to Indigenous students' lives as the car starts and stops, comparing and contrasting the tugs and pulls of colliding and affirming values of different generations within a community. The poem itself is **accurate** in demonstrating a core value of Indigenous people—a reverence for nature. The poem is also **respectful**. The young person sees the wisdom in the grandfather's perspective as he says that "they have places to go, too." In one more way it is **relevant**. The poet knows that the journey will continue, indicating that the stops along the way will not make it end; rather, they enrich the journey.

For an Indigenous student to read a poem that links his world to the requirements of showing his comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking skills for the COE, careful and thoughtful questions must follow the same criteria used to identify a culturally-relevant literary selection. Using the same criteria, these three questions would be evaluated by educators of Indigenous students to ensure their authenticity and validity.

1. What is an inference you can make about the grandfather's connection to nature?
2. Compare and contrast the young person's and the grandfather's journeys in the poem.
3. What do you think happened to the young person in the car after the grandfather says "they have places to go, too"?

In question #1, the student is asked to make an inference from the poem to support an answer that comes from the student's thinking. Since the question asks about the connection to nature, the task writer hopes the student will respond to the **authenticity** of the setting and bring his background knowledge and respect for older generations to his reading answers. In question #2, the reader is asked to compare and contrast the two journeys. The task writer is attempting to ground the question in **relevancy**. In this poem there is tension between the young person and the grandfather. They each have a different idea about their destinations. The task writer hopes that students will reflect on the differences and the similarities in the poem as well as their own experiences. In question #3, the task writer asks students to extend beyond the poem and bring their own values to their answers. Students may develop a response that brings their own backgrounds to the question. This question is **respectful** of students' unique backgrounds and allows for an entry place for them to share personal connections to the poem.

In the Writing COE, a work sample is a persuasive or expository example of student work that is a response to a prompt. A writing prompt for the COE must contain three elements: topic, audience, and purpose. In order to bring a work sample to life, the student must want to bring his life to the work sample. One popular Writing COE prompt that many Indigenous students have included in their COEs is the "Dear Grandchildren" prompt. It is now released to the field via the COE webpage and is available for classroom practice. The prompt reads:

> *Dear Grandchildren*
>
> Although it may be hard to imagine, but in your future you may have grandchildren! In a multiple-paragraph letter to those future grandchildren, **explain** how a special time or an event in your life so far would be important for them to know about. Remember to support your position using specific reasons and examples.

The **authentic and relevant** nature of the prompt is the focus on family and learning. The concept of explaining how "a special time or event" in a student's life is important is a **fair prompt as it values the lessons learned through growing up**. Students can write from a "safe place," because the prompt itself provides validation for them individually and as part of a community. Lastly,

the opportunity to look forward to future generations and see the power of family in their lives, the lessons they have learned, and the reflection they are able to make through the examples they provide, establishes a writing opportunity that is **respectful**.

In the mathematics COE, students are asked to demonstrate an understanding and an application of examples of mathematics skills in algebra and geometry. The students also are asked to show their work and explain how they got their answers. The mathematics tasks adhere to the same guidelines for cultural responsiveness as reading and writing. Some tasks incorporate everyday life concepts, and specific economic, policy, or resource issues. The tasks are about actual issues involving fisheries, forests, art, and land management. The mathematics skills are embedded into these topics and give students a viable reason for solving real-life problems.

A sample mathematics COE task would provide the student with a scenario or a context that makes a connection to real life experiences. A graph might be titled with a relevant issue to Indigenous students' lives. It may describe the number of fish caught over a period of years, or the number of canoes that participate in the annual Canoe Journey for Puget Sound Tribes, or the number of families supporting students participating in school sports teams. The student is then asked to review the information, use mathematical knowledge to construct a representation about the relationships using a scatter plot or another appropriate mode, and finally draw conclusions about the information using the intersection of mathematic skills and relevant knowledge.

Each mathematics COE task should be **authentic, relevant, respectful,** and **accurate**. A task that addresses all four of these characteristics will be accessible to a wide audience of students. An **authentic** task is one that uses mathematics in a way it would be used in a real-world situation. For example, a task may ask students to use skills from the Data and Statistics strand to organize, represent, and analyze data around the use and sustainability of natural resources. When developing tasks that are **authentic**, the focus should be on the actual ways mathematics is used in the everyday world—both mainstream and reflective of the Indigenous ways.

A mathematics COE task represents an **authentic** connection, both difficult and **respectful,** between the mainstream world and the reverence Indigenous people have for fish populations,

canoe journeys, or community involvement in school sports. In a potential mathematics COE task where a student demonstrates his mathematical skills by using real-life data about fish populations, the context surrounding the mathematics task is critical. An agency representing the "mainstream world," such as the Washington State Department of Fisheries, may use the information from the graph differently. The researchers may think of fish populations as a way to measure the health of a species or as a representation of effects on nature due to pollution or over fishing; whereas, the job of analyzing this data from a mathematical perspective for Indigenous students is both personal and **relevant** to their cultural values. The option is not only to show the mathematics skills needed to solve this problem but also to include a prediction about the future of the fish population and connect it to the students' world, both historical and present.

Anton Jackson, Mathematics Specialist at OSPI, says that:

Mathematics COE tasks should be relevant to the experiences and goals of Indigenous students. Because those experiences and goals are as varied as the students themselves, it is important to involve those students in the … selection of relevant tasks for their COE. For example, tasks can be developed and reviewed at that state level for students who have keen interests in auto repair, construction, resource management, music, art, and education. The more a student can relate to and be engaged with the task, the better that student will perform on the task.

In all cases, mathematics COE tasks should be respectful of the experiences, culture, and background of all peoples. Each task should go through a review process that involves input from a variety of people with various backgrounds. Special attention should be given to ensuring the respectful representation of all peoples by eliminating stereotypes and culturally-insensitive scenarios or situations. Tasks that present people in positive, appropriate situations will appeal to a wide audience of students.

Finally, the mathematics in COE tasks should be accurate. For example, when developing a task related to construction of a traditional, Indigenous building, attention should be given to the accuracy of the mathematics in the task. As with ensuring the task is respectful, ensuring an accurate task can be achieved through a thoughtful, thorough review of the task.[12]

Impact of COE

The impact of the COE on students' lives is not only visible in their analyses of poems about journeys, or papers about their elders, or mathematics problems about fish populations. The authors interviewed an Indigenous student to find out how the COE gave her an alterNative way of showing her skills and linking her own collection to her culture. One young woman from a Tribe in the Puyallup Valley shared her story with us.[13] She was a giggly, smiling young woman whom we could not help but like immediately. She placed in the advanced level of the state writing assessment a year earlier because she liked the topic "Community Values," but she says the state reading test was confusing to her.

"That test was a lot of pressure," she said with a dramatic sigh. "It was so much pressure. I couldn't look at anyone or talk about anything. I felt like I had to squeeze it out all at once. When I didn't pass I found out I had to take a COE class." She rolled her eyes. "I thought the COE class was bad, until my teacher told me I only had to write one essay a week. It was like a weight lifted off my shoulders. And," she emphasized, "I read more interesting articles, so it made it better and easier to write about."

One passage the student talked about that affected her strongly was a magazine article that described how the original fireplaces in the White House were built by slaves over 150 years ago. Now, an African-American President lives in the White House. She talked about how sad it made her feel, but then she said her feelings changed and she read the article carefully looking for evidence to support her answers. She said she wrote long answers to the questions because the topic *mattered* to her.

The student is deeply involved in the traditions of her culture. She enthusiastically describes her involvement in Pow-wows where she sings and dances the messages of her Tribe. Just a few weeks before the interview she was selected to be a Princess for one of the Tribal organizations in her local community. "I should have had a class like this (a COE class) as a freshman. Now I can pick apart an article and analyze it. I know all of those skills now," she waved her hand at the back of the room where her teacher had pasted all the titles of the reading strands and targets.

When asked what she was going to do when she graduates, she beams. "I am going to go to either cosmetology school or massage school. I'm going to open up my own business someday. I am also going to community college. I want to have something to fall back on."

When asked if she had anything she would like to tell other COE students, she stood up from her desk as if she was ready to move on to her next challenge in life. "Tell them to be prepared to read and write. And, tell them not to procrastinate. I did that, and I had to write a lot at the end of the week." She passed the Reading COE with flying colors. She was very excited about graduation and all of the doors a high school diploma would open for her.

A principal from a Tribal school in Western Washington emailed the COE staff about the powerful experience a student and his teachers felt when he passed his writing COE. The following is an excerpt from the email:

The student has been living on his own for more than six years. He has lived a hard life, not only by living on his own from the time he was a young teenager, but he also experienced gangs, drugs, alcohol, and violence....he decided to make a big change in his life. The student does not want to get a GED or to consider himself a dropout. He wants to earn a high school diploma and graduate. He values education. He has come a long way down the "Red Road." [The "Red Road" is a phrase used to represent one who is walking the road of balance, living right and following the rules of the Creator. It is behavior, attitude, and a way of living, a way of 'doing' with reverence—of walking strong yet softly, so as not to harm or disturb other life. (The administrator provided this definition in her email.)] He knows that to live a better life and continue down the Red Road, he needs that diploma. The only thing standing in his way is the writing assessment requirement. The COE is his opportunity to meet that requirement.

He came back to high school to complete the writing COE. Since he had only missed passing the writing WASL by one point, and the results were not back from the writing COE, and he had done all that was required for graduation, we thought he was good to go. When we found out that he barely missed passing the writing WASL again, he did a COE. Again, he missed by one point. He stuck with it and did an augmented COE and submitted it for scoring. The student passed the writing COE. He was ready to graduate.[14]

The Tribal educators sent the COE staff a picture of the student standing in the school, smiling, and holding his diploma proudly in front of him. We look at this picture often. We do not share his name or his school, but he is one of the great stories of the COE's positive impact on Indigenous students.

Conclusion

Here we conclude our survey of the reasons for culturally-relevant assessments in Washington state that could be used to meet high school graduation requirements. The creation of the COE has become more than just a set of "different" tasks. Gordon's thinking—that intellect, affect, and social situations all jointly engage with the cognitive process—sets a precedent for deconstructing the COE as "just" an assessment. Like our young woman who felt profoundly impacted by the information about an African-American President living in a house that African-American slaves help build, culturally-relevant "alterNatives," became a locus for the connection between the mainstream society and the Indigenous world. Our learning was intellectual and emotional; it was social and cerebral. The COE was designed to be "alterNative," and yet the path was traveled by students who came from varied backgrounds with different sets of values. The commitment to creating reading passages, writing prompts, and mathematics problems that reflect the need for authenticity of content, relevancy to students' lives, and accurate portrayals of history has led to the development of respectful, fair, valid and reliable assessments.

What happens next to the COE? The COE is well known across the state. The fact that the COE is anchored in the classroom means also that it is bound to its roots as a culturally-relevant assessment. Without the culturally-relevant framework of the COE, it would not interest students and teachers would not see its value. As an "alterNative" assessment, the COE has been fluid, changeable, open, and supportive. Indigenous students can find themselves in the tasks and/or make connections to other contexts. It is as much a starting place as an ending place. Where it may have been an "alterNative" in the beginning, it has come to be many alterNatives. The numbers of diverse students now earning high school diplomas are making their voices heard. Their words—like songs—have a cadence, a rhythm, and a sound that were unknown to the mainstream world before. Now their stories are present, confident, culturally-rich, and empowered.

Endnotes

[1] Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. 2004. RCW 28A.655.061. Relating to authorizing alterNative methods of assessment and appeal processes for the certificate of academic achievement. Retrieved from http://www.k12.wa.us/GraduationRequirements/Requirement-CAA-CIA.aspx

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